

Claims

1. (previously presented) An apparatus for continuous formation of composites comprising a mixture of filler and thermoactive materials, the apparatus comprising a mixer for forming the mixture of filler and thermoactive material and providing a continuous charge of the mixture to a conveyor, which conveys the continuous charge to a hot-gas distribution system having at least one pair of gas cells positioned along the conveyor for applying hot gas to the charge in a consolidation zone, wherein a first cell of the pair applies hot gas to one side of the charge and wherein a second cell of the pair operates at a pressure less than that of the first cell, thereby creating a pressure differential across the charge, the second cell receiving gas expelled by the first cell, the apparatus further comprising shrouds that substantially surround the pair of gas cells.

2. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 having plural paired gas cells.

3. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the gas cells are rollers.

4. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the gas cells are stationary.

Claim 5 (canceled)

6. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the mixer includes a hot-gas inlet for receiving hot gas from a source for heating the filler material and the thermoactive material.

7. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the mixer comprises a cyclone mixer.

8. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 and further comprising baffles positioned adjacent the gas cells.

9. (original) The apparatus according to claim 2 and further comprising baffles positioned adjacent at least one of the gas cells.

Claims 10-11 (canceled)

12. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the hot-gas distribution system comprises multiple pairs of cells, including cells for applying a densifying force to the charge, and wherein the pairs of cells are fluidly interconnected in series with a gas application cell of one pair connected to a suction or evacuation cell of same pair, with the suction or evacuation cell of one pair connected in series to press cell of another pair.

13. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 2 wherein such apparatus comprising first paired gas cells, a first cell of the pair applying hot gas to a charge and a second cell of the pair operating to receive gas applied to the charge by the first cell of the pair, and at least a second pair of gas cells positioned adjacent the first paired gas cells, where a first cell of the second paired gas cells, positioned adjacent the first cell of the first paired gas cells, receives hot gas applied to the charge by a second cell of the second pair, the gas flowing through the charge and received by the first cell of the second pair, thereby providing pulsed hot gas application to the charge as the charge moves between pairs of cells.

14. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 1 where the conveyor conveys the continuous charge in a first direction, and gas flows in a direction opposite to the first direction of charge movement through the consolidation zone.

15. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 1 where the conveyor conveys the continuous charge of the mixture in a first direction, and wherein the gas flows in the first direction of charge movement through the consolidation zone.

16. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein each cell is a drum-type roller.

17. (original) The apparatus according to claim 16 wherein the rollers include central stationary gas application or recovery portion.

18. (previously presented) An apparatus for the continuous formation of composites comprising a mixture of filler and thermoactive materials, the apparatus comprising:

a mixer that forms the mixture of filler and thermoactive material and provides a continuous charge of the mixture to a conveyor for continuously moving a charge through a consolidation zone; and

at least a first pair of gas cells positioned on opposite sides of the charge, one cell of the pair for injecting hot gas into the charge, the other cell of the pair for drawing gas through the moving charge, the apparatus further comprising shrouds that substantially surround the gas cells.

19. (original) The apparatus according to claim 18 further comprising multiple pairs of cells.

20. (original) The apparatus according to claim 19 wherein the multiple cells are fluidly interconnected.

21. (original) The apparatus according to claim 19 wherein the multiple cells are interconnected in series.

22. (original) The apparatus according to claim 19 wherein the multiple cells are interconnected in parallel.

23. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 18 where the conveyor for conveying the continuous charge moves in a first direction, and where the gas flow direction is opposite to charge moving direction.

24. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 18 where the conveyor for conveying the continuous charge moves in a first direction, and where the gas flow direction is the same as charge moving direction.

25. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 18 comprising first paired gas cells, a first cell of the pair applying hot gas to the charge and a second cell of the pair operating to receive hot gas applied to the charge by the first cell of the pair, and at least a second pair of gas cells positioned adjacent the first paired gas cells, where a first cell of the second paired gas cells, positioned adjacent the first cell of the first paired gas cells, receives hot gas applied to the charge by a second cell of the second pair, the gas flowing through the charge and received by the first cell of the second pair, thereby providing pulses of hot gas to the moving charge.

26-31 (canceled)

32. (currently amended) A system for continuously forming a composite that includes thermoactive material and filler material, comprising:

a mixer for forming a mixture comprising filler material and thermoactive material;

a continuous consolidation apparatus for applying hot-gas to a charge in a consolidation zone, the apparatus comprising plural paired gas cells wherein a first cell of each pair applies gas to one major surface of a charge and wherein a second cell of each pair operates at a pressure less than that of the first cell, thereby creating a pressure differential across the charge, the second cell receiving gas passing through the charge, the consolidation apparatus further comprising shrouds that substantially surround at least one pair of the plural paired gas cells; and

a first densifying apparatus downstream from the consolidation apparatus for applying a densifying pressure to the charge.

33. (original) The system according to claim 32 and further including a mat-forming apparatus upstream of the consolidation apparatus.

34. (previously presented) The system according to claim 32 and further comprising a second densifying apparatus upstream of the consolidation apparatus.

Claim 35 (canceled)

36. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus-system~~ according to claim 32 wherein the densifying apparatus comprises densifying pressure cells for applying a densifying pressure to the charge.

Claim 37 (canceled)

38. (previously presented) The system according to claim 32 and further comprising a second densifying apparatus comprising densifying cells downstream of the gas cells.

39. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus-system~~ according to claim 32 wherein the densifying apparatus operates continuously.

40. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus-system~~ according to claim 32 wherein the densifying apparatus operates batchwise.

41. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus-system~~ according to claim 32 wherein the gas cells comprise press cells.

42. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus-system~~ according to claim 32 comprising a press comprising press cells downstream of the gas cells.

Claims 43-44 (canceled)

45. (currently amended) A system for making composites comprising at least one thermoactive material and at least one filler material, the system comprising:

a ~~ethylene~~mixer for forming mixtures comprising thermoactive and filler materials;
a mat-forming apparatus for forming mats from the mixture;
a continuous consolidation apparatus for receiving the mat, the consolidation apparatus having a hot-gas distribution system comprising plural paired rollers wherein a first roller of each pair applies gas to a charge and wherein a second roller of each pair operates at a pressure less than ambient, the consolidation apparatus comprising shrouds that substantially surround at least one pair of the plural paired rollers; and
a densifying apparatus for applying a densifying pressure to the charge downstream of the consolidation apparatus.

46-72 (canceled)

73. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 1 and further comprising a surface modifier for surface modifying at least a portion of a surface of the composite.

74. (currently amended) The ~~apparatus~~system according to claim 73 where the surface ~~modifying apparatus~~modifier operates by flame oxidation, corona oxidation, e-beam, photoactivation, and combinations thereof.

Claims 75-77 (canceled)